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ABSTRACT

This study compared student satisfaction with various academic advising arrangements and determined the underlying considerations that affected their satisfaction. Students in 21 classes at a large public university completed a survey asking who their current academic advisor was and how well the current advising system met their needs. Students who were advised by advising center staff reported the highest degree of satisfaction with students advised by faculty reporting somewhat lesser satisfaction. Students preferred advising centers because of their more proactive approach and faculty because of the personal relationships formed. Students advised by peer counselors were the least satisfied because peers were not proactive, were often not available, and were usually not known to the advisee. Students tended to evaluate their advisors on six fairly separate dimensions, specifically the degree to which they were: (1) encouraging during meetings; (2) proactive in arranging meetings and defining responsibilities and obstacles to reaching student goals; (3) respectful of student opinions; (4) approachable; (5) personally knowledgeable about and interested in the advisee; and (6) good time managers who were on time for appointments, unhurried during the appointment, and available when needed. (DB)

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Student Satisfaction and Academic Advising

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This paper was presented at the Thirty-Ninth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held in Seattle, Washington, May 30-June 3, 1999.
This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of AIR Forum Papers.

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Student Satisfaction and Academic Advising

Abstract

Especially at large universities, the task of who does the advising often is assigned based on pragmatic considerations rather than student preferences or needs. This study compared student satisfaction with varying advising arrangements and determined the underlying considerations that affected their satisfaction. Students seemed most satisfied with the advising system when they were advised by advising center staff and secondly by faculty. They preferred advising centers because of their more proactive approach and faculty because of the personal relationships formed. Peer counselors were at the bottom in satisfaction because they were not proactive, available, or known to the advisee.

Student Satisfaction and Academic Advising

As the role of institutional research (IR) offices continues to grow, institutional researchers are often asked to step into academic and student affairs domains where they have not traditionally been involved. In part, this is due to the increased data requirements in meeting accreditation standards. It also is due to the shift in institutional perspective toward addressing student needs and concerns as part of total quality improvement or other student-oriented approaches. Continued focus, too, on issues of retention has led many into the advising domain. Though researchers such as Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) conclude that research on the influence of advising on persistence has shown mixed results, Metzner (1989) found that high-quality advising had a positive indirect effect on persistence transmitted through its positive impact on such variables as grades and satisfaction and its negative effect on intent to leave the institution. Others (Braxton, Duster, and Pascarella, 1988) have reported similar results.

Tinto (1987) discusses advising as an institutional tool for retention in several contexts. He sees early and continued faculty contact, especially through orientation programs but also through advising and mentoring, as helpful in retaining students. Effective counseling and advising programs which are systematically linked to other student services and programs on campus is another approach mentioned.

As Tinto notes, institutions take a variety of approaches to providing student advising. Larger public institutions provide the greatest variety. Habley (1992), in the ACT fourth national survey of academic advising, reports that faculty served as advisors in all departments at only 47% of the four-year public institutions surveyed compared to 82% of four-year private schools. Instead, responsibilities were handled by non-instructional personnel (5% of all and 80% of some departments), paraprofessionals (4% of all and 56% of some departments) and student peers (2% of all and 40% of some departments).

Often the task of who does the advising is assigned based on pragmatic considerations rather than student preferences or needs. In fact, Gardiner (1994) notes that Astin (1987), after reviewing several national surveys, concluded that undergraduates tend to be more dissatisfied with academic advising than with almost any other service they receive.

Purpose of the Study

Advising is an essential academic service that has too often been ignored. As a result, good advising has gone unrecognized and unrewarded. This study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the dimensions that describe advisors and advising?

- Do varying advising arrangements have different levels of student satisfaction?
- What considerations affect student satisfaction with varying advising approaches (e.g., faculty advisors vs. student peer advisors)?

Methodology

This study was conducted at a single large public university with varying approaches to advising depending upon major and class. A random sample of 25 on-campus undergraduate classes were drawn in such a way that no student would be in more than one class. Of the 25 classes selected, 24 faculty agreed to participate in the study and 21 (or 84%) returned the survey. The total number of surveys returned were 890. It was estimated that if everyone had attended the classes selected and filled out the survey on that day, 1,172 surveys would have been completed. Therefore, the student response rate was over 75%, using the (unrealistic) assumptions of up-to-date class records and perfect attendance.

The students were asked who their current academic advisor was and how well the current advising system met their needs. Results indicated that 46% had faculty advisors, 14% had advising center staff, 7% had peer counselors, 4% had other college staff, and 29% had no current advisor. About half (51%) agreed the current advising system adequately met their needs. About a third thought the current system was less than adequate (23%) or poor (10%). For the other hand, 11% thought the system more than adequately met their needs and 5% thought their needs were met exceptionally well.

An ACT survey of academic advising was employed for the study, especially focusing on a series of 36 items which asked students for impressions of their advisor and advising practices. To gain a better understanding of the dimensions underlying the advising process, the items were submitted to maximum likelihood factor analysis. Using a varimax rotation, six definable factors emerged. Factor scores were calculated for each respondent for each factor and standardized so that the mean was 100 and the standard deviation was 10.

To compare type of advisor and satisfaction with the advising process as a whole, a Row Mean Scores Difference test was employed. Multiple regression provided the information on how well each advising factor predicted students' ratings of satisfaction with advising. Finally, to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of each form of advising (e.g., faculty, advising center, student peer), means were compared on the six advising factors using Analysis of Variance and follow-up mean comparisons using Tukey's. A probability level of .05 was used in each case.

Findings

Results of the factor analysis indicated that advisors could be described on six general dimensions: encouraging, proactive, respectful, approachable, personal, and time management. Factor 1, *Encouraging*, included items such as "encourages me to talk about myself," "encourages my involvement in extra-curricular activities," "helps me examine my needs, interests, and values," and "encourages my interest in a discipline." Factor 2, *Proactive,* included items such as "takes the initiative in arranging meetings," "defines advisor/advisee responsibilities," "helps me identify obstacles to goals," and "refers me to other sources for assistance." Factor 3, named *Respectful,* included items such as "respects my opinions and feelings," "respects my right to make my own decisions," "is a good listener," and "provides a caring, open atmosphere." Factor 4, *Approachable*, included items such as "seems to enjoy advising," "is approachable and easy to talk to," "is a helpful advisor I would recommend to others," and "has a sense of humor." Factor 5, *Personal,* included "knows who I am" and "expresses interest in me as an individual." Factor 6, *Time Manager*, included "is on time for appointments," "allows sufficient time to discuss issues," and "is available when I need assistance." See Table 1 for items and factor loadings of .40 or greater. Only one item failed to load on any factor using this criterion.

Table 1. Advising Survey Factors

Item: **My Advisor:**	Encour-aging	Pro-active	Re-spectful	Approach-able	Per-sonal	Time Mgt
Encourages me to talk about myself	.676					
Encourages my involvement in extracurricular activities	.653					
Helps me examine my needs, interests, & values	.629					
Encourages my interest in an academic discipline	.608					
Anticipates my needs	.604					
Helps me explore careers in my field of interest	.594					
Is willing to discuss personal problems	.571					
Is familiar with my academic background	.555					
Shows concern for my personal growth & development	.547					
Helps me select courses matching interests & abilities	.503					

Item: **My Advisor:**	Encour-aging	Pro-active	Re-spectful	Approach-able	Per-sonal	Time Mgt
Is knowledgeable about courses outside my major field	.427					
Takes the initiative in arranging meetings with me	.402	.624				
Clearly defines advisor/advisee responsibilities		.596				
Helps me identify the obstacles to reaching my goals		.579				
Refers me to other sources for assistance		.569				
Accepts feedback concerning effectiveness as advisor		.511	.437			
Keeps me up to date on changes in requirements		.509				
Encourages me to assume an active role in planning my academic program		.434				
Provides me with accurate information about requirements, prerequisites, etc.		.431				
Encourages me to achieve my educational goals		.422				
Respects my opinions and feelings			.699			
Respects my right to make my own decisions			.681			
Is a good listener			.572			
Provides a caring, open environment			.522			
Checks to make sure we understand each other		.421	.437			
Seems to enjoy advising				.639		
Is approachable and easy to talk to			.432	.601		
Is a helpful, effective advisor whom I would recommend to other students				.523		
Has a sense of humor				.508		
Is flexible in helping me plan my academic program				.406		
Knows who I am					.679	
Expresses an interest in me as an individual					.501	
Is on time for appointments						.542
Allows sufficient time to discuss issues or problems	.400					.492

Item: **My Advisor:**	Encour-aging	Pro-active	Re-spectful	Approach-able	Per-sonal	Time Mgt.
Is available when I need assistance						.432
Keeps personal information confidential						
Weighted variance explained by factor	21.12	15.48	17.06	12.90	8.32	8.28
Unweighted variance explained by factor	6.12	4.67	4.52	3.33	2.24	1.98

A Row Mean Scores (RMS) Difference test indicated that differences in satisfaction existed depending on who the student had as an advisor (RMS=40.02, df=4, p=.001). Students were most satisfied with the advising system when they were advised by advising center staff. The next most satisfied group were those who were advised by faculty. There appeared to be little difference between being advised by peer counselors and having no advisor at all in terms of satisfaction with the advising system. See Table 2 for further details.

Table 2. Current academic advisor and ratings of how well the advising system meets needs

	Percent who indicated that the advising system met their needs:				
Current advisor:	Exceptionally well	More than adequately	Adequately	Less than adequately	Very poorly
Faculty (n=384)	5.73	12.76	50.78	20.83	9.90
Advising center staff (n=118)	13.56	19.49	44.92	18.64	3.39
Other college staff (n=36)	0.00	11.11	50.00	27.78	11.11
Peer counselor (n=63)	1.59	4.76	52.38	30.16	11.11
No advisor (n=226)	1.33	6.64	53.10	27.43	11.50
Total	5.08	11.37	50.67	23.34	9.55

In addition, scores on the six dimensions of advising were useful in explaining student satisfaction with the advising process (R^2=.31, F=44.93, df=6,594, p=.0001). Each factor also was important in its own way in explaining how advisor perceptions related to student satisfaction with the advising process. However, scores on the *Proactive* dimension of advising were most highly related to advising satisfaction. This was followed by the *Encouraging* dimension of advising and the *Approachable* dimension. See Table 3 below for further details.

Table 3. Regression Equation Predicting How Well Advising System Meets Needs From Six Dimensions/Factors of Advising

Variable	Standardized B	T for HO	Prob > T
Factor 1: Encouraging	0.224	6.466	.0001
Factor 2: Proactive	0.347	10.075	.0001
Factor 3: Respectful	0.125	3.604	.0003
Factor 4: Approachable	0.210	6.085	.0001
Factor 5: Personal	0.088	2.560	.0107
Factor 6: Time Manager	0.111	3.218	.0014

Next, the six advising factors were tested using analysis of variance to see if mean differences occurred depending upon whether the student had advising center staff, faculty, other staff, or peer counselors as their current advisors. Differences were found for three of the six characteristics: proactive ($F=7.47$, $df=3,599$, $p=.0001$), personal ($F=22.06$, $df=3,599$, $p=.001$), and time management ($F=8.73$, $df=3,599$, $p=.0001$). For the proactive dimension, follow-up tests indicated that advising center staff were rated much more highly than any other group, and none of the other groups differed from one another on this dimension. For the personal dimension, faculty were rated much more highly than any other group, and none of the other groups differed from one another. In the area of time management, advising center staff and faculty were rated more highly than peer counselors. Advising center staff were also rated more highly than other staff in this area.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study found that when students rated their advisors, they used six fairly separate dimensions. Advisors could be described based on extent to which they were encouraging during their meetings, proactive in arranging meetings and defining responsibilities and obstacles to reaching student goals, respectful of student opinions, approachable, personally knowledgeable about and interested in the advisee, and good time managers so they were on time for appointments, unhurried during the appointment, and available when the student needed them.

Students were most satisfied with the advising system when they were advised by advising center staff (78% of students thought the system adequately met their needs). Secondly, they preferred faculty as advisors (70% with

faculty advisors thought the system adequately met their needs). The proactive dimension weighed most heavily in predicting advising satisfaction followed by the encouraging and approachable dimensions.

It appears that students appreciate advising centers because of the more proactive approach that center staff take to advising, calling students to set appointments and checking on their progress. Students also appreciate the personal relationships that they form with faculty. In addition, it seems important to students that advising center staff and faculty are more likely to meet their appointment obligations and be around for future help if students need it. Peer counselors were at the bottom in satisfaction because they were not proactive, available, or known to the advisee.

These results are limited to a single institution with its own ways of implementing advising. Yet the approach could be helpful to other large institutions with multiple approaches to advising because it helps to explain in a straight-forward manner why students might be more satisfied with one approach compared to another. The findings also make explicit the trade-offs in choosing different forms of advising. At our institution, the survey was conducted at a time that we were preparing to study the advising process. Results therefore were taken into account when making recommendations. Department chairpersons with peer advisor programs are now being urged to reconsider the way such programs are currently being implemented or if peer advising should be disbanded. In addition, the author is heading a committee to develop advisor evaluations that departments can use to assess their advising practices on an on-going basis.

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